

What is claimed is:

1. A stabilizer, comprising:
 - a. a bifurcated member having two elongated prongs, each prong having a proximal end and an opposite distal end, said prongs attached to each other adjacent the proximal ends thereof, at least a portion of each prong adapted to engage a heart of a patient;
 - b. an elongated handle segment having a first end and an opposite second end; and
 - c. means for rotatably and pivotally connecting the first end of said handle segment to said bifurcated member, wherein said connecting means allows said bifurcated member to rotate and pivot relative to said handle segment so that said bifurcated member is movable to a desired position.
2. The stabilizer of Claim 1, wherein the prongs of said bifurcated member are attached to each other by means of a connecting member, said connecting member having opposed ends in which each end is fixedly attached to one prong adjacent its proximal end.
3. The stabilizer of Claim 1, wherein said connecting means comprises:
 - a. a longitudinally-extending bore within said handle segment; and
 - b. a ball, said ball disposed within said bore adjacent the first end of said handle segment, a portion of said ball fixedly attached to said bifurcated member, said ball movably secured within said bore so that said ball and attached bifurcated member are rotatably and pivotally movable relative to said handle segment without separating therefrom.
4. The stabilizer of Claim 3, further comprising means for locking said connecting means so that said bifurcated member is held in the desired position.
5. The stabilizer of Claim 4, wherein said locking means comprises:

a. a shaft having an upper end and an opposite lower end, at least a portion of said shaft complementarily received within said bore;

b. a socket attached to the lower end of said shaft, said socket having an interior surface of a size to complementarily and detachably engage said ball; and

c. means for adjustably positioning said shaft and attached socket within said bore between an engaged position, in which the interior surface of said socket detachably engages said ball to frictionally hold said ball in the desired position, and a disengaged position, in which the interior surface of said socket and said ball are spaced apart so that said ball is movable.

6. The stabilizer of Claim 5, wherein said positioning means further comprises a portion of said bore complementarily engaging a portion of said shaft so that the interface therebetween controls the relative movement between said shaft and said bore as said shaft is moved within said bore.

7. The stabilizer of Claim 6, wherein the portions of said bore and said shaft that engage each other are complementarily threaded surfaces.

8. The stabilizer of Claim 7, wherein said bore extends between the first and second ends of said handle segment, said bore having a length, wherein a portion of said shaft extends substantially the length of said bore, and wherein said shaft further comprises a tightener fixedly attached to the upper end thereof and disposed outside said bore, wherein rotation of said tightener moves said shaft and attached socket longitudinally between the engaged and disengaged positions.

9. The stabilizer of Claim 3, wherein said connecting means further comprises means for removably mounting said bifurcated member to said handle segment.

10. The stabilizer of Claim 9, wherein said removable mounting means comprises a portion of said handle segment defining an opening therethrough for allowing said ball to traverse therethrough so that said ball is movable between a occupied position, in

which said ball is disposed within said bore, and a withdrawn position, in which said ball is removed from said bore.

11. The stabilizer of Claim 10, wherein the opening of said handle segment is disposed intermediate the first and second ends of said handle segment and wherein, when said shaft and attached socket are in the engaged position, said ball is positioned closer to the first end of said handle segment than when said ball traverses through the opening, whereby said ball and attached bifurcated member are prevented from moving to the withdrawn position.

12. The stabilizer of Claim 1, wherein said connecting means comprises:

- a. a bore longitudinally extending through said handle segment;
- b. a shaft having an upper end and an opposite lower end, at least a portion of said shaft complementarily received within said bore;
- c. a ball fixedly attached to the lower end of said shaft;
- d. a socket having an interior surface, a top end and an opposed bottom end, wherein said interior surface complementarily and detachably engages said ball, said socket defining an opening therein adjacent the top end thereof through which a portion of said shaft adjacent said ball extends, the bottom end of said socket adapted to mount said bifurcated member thereto; and
- e. a bowl-shaped member fixedly attached to the first end of said handle segment for receiving a portion of said socket therein.

13. The stabilizer of Claim 12, further comprising means for locking said connecting means so that said bifurcated member is held in the desired position.

14. The stabilizer of Claim 13, wherein said locking means comprises means for adjustably positioning said shaft relative to said handle segment between an engaged position, in which the interior surface of said socket engages said ball and said bowl-shaped member engages said socket so that said bowl-shaped member and said ball frictionally hold said socket disposed therebetween in the desired position, and a

disengaged position, in which said socket and said bowl-shaped member are spaced apart so that said socket and attached bifurcated member are movable.

15. The stabilizer of Claim 14, wherein said positioning means further comprises a portion of said bore complementarily engaging a portion of said shaft so that the interface therebetween controls the relative movement between said shaft and said bore as said shaft is moved within said bore.

16. The stabilizer of Claim 15, wherein the portions of said bore and said shaft that engage each other are complementarily threaded surfaces.

17. The stabilizer of Claim 16, wherein said bore extends between the first and second ends thereof, said bore having a length, wherein a portion of said shaft extends substantially the length of said bore, and wherein said handle segment further comprises a tightener rotatably attached to the second end thereof, wherein said tightener defines a threaded bore therethrough which complementarily engages a section of the threaded portion of said shaft, wherein rotation of said tightener longitudinally moves said shaft between the engaged and disengaged positions.

18. The stabilizer of Claim 17, wherein said connecting means further comprises means for removably mounting said bifurcated member to said socket.

19. The stabilizer of Claim 18, wherein said removable mounting means comprises:

- a. a detent in the interior surface of said socket;
- b. a plunger device having a shell and at least one circular member disposed within said shell, the shell having a center and an outer periphery, the outer periphery complementarily received within a portion of the interior surface of said socket; and
- c. means for biasing the circular member of said plunger device away from the center of the shell toward its outer periphery so that a portion of said circular member is biased to extend past the outer periphery,

wherein said plunger device is movable between an occupied position, in which a portion of said plunger device is disposed within the interior surface of said circular member so that a portion of said circular member is disposed within the detent of said socket, and a withdrawn position, in which said plunger device is spaced apart from said socket, and

wherein, when in the occupied position, said biasing means biases said circular member into the detent of said socket preventing said bifurcated member from freely separating from said socket.

20. The stabilizer of Claim 1, further comprising means for mounting said handle segment to a rib retractor.

21. The stabilizer of Claim 20, wherein said mounting means comprises a swivel head having a first portion, a second portion, and a tightening portion, the first portion defining a slot therethrough which is of a size to slidably and adjustably receive a portion of said handle segment therein, the second section defining an opening therethrough which is adapted to detachably and slidably engage a portion of the rib retractor, and the tightening portion being adapted to secure said handle segment at a desired position in the slot of the first portion and to secure the swivel head at a desired position on the rib retractor.

22. The apparatus of Claim 1, wherein at least a portion of one prong of said bifurcated member further comprises means for stabilizing the portion thereof adapted to engage the heart from sliding on the heart when in contact therewith.

23. The apparatus of Claim 22, wherein said stabilizing means comprises a textured surface on the prong, the textured surface being a DeBakey serrated pattern.

24. The stabilizer of Claim 1, wherein said connecting means further comprises means for removably mounting said bifurcated member to said handle segment.

25. A stabilizer, comprising:

- a. a bifurcated member having two elongated prongs, each prong having a proximal end and an opposite distal end, said prongs being attached to each other adjacent the proximal ends thereof, at least a portion of each prong being adapted to engage a heart of a patient;
- b. an elongated handle segment having a first end and an opposite second end;
- c. means for rotatably and pivotally connecting the first end of said handle segment to said bifurcated member, wherein said connecting means allows said bifurcated member to rotate and pivot relative to said handle segment so that said bifurcated member is movable to a desired position; and
- d. means for locking said bifurcated member in the desired position.

26. The stabilizer of Claim 25, wherein said connecting means further comprises means for removably mounting said bifurcated member to said handle segment.